

John Ericsson

A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress

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Revised by Patrick Kerwin



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2003

Contact information: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mss/address.html>

**Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress
Manuscript Division, 2003**

2004-07-19 converted from EAD 1.0 to EAD 2002

Collection Summary

Title: Papers of John Ericsson

Span Dates: 1821-1890

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1842-1886)

ID No.: MSS19877

Creator: Ericsson, John, 1803-1889

Extent: 1,500 items; 11 containers; 4.4 linear feet; 6 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English, and Swedish

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Engineer and inventor. Correspondence, writings, design specifications, articles, memoranda, technical notes, financial and legal papers, drawings, printed matter, and miscellany relating primarily to Ericsson's activities in marine engineering, especially his work on screw propellers and his design of the steamship *Princeton* and the ironclad *Monitor*. Includes correspondence of Ericsson's biographer, William C. Church.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Names:

Ericsson, John, 1803-1889
Adlersparre, A.--Correspondence
Browning, S. B.--Correspondence
Chandler, William E. (William Eaton), 1835-1917--Correspondence
Church, William Conant, 1836-1917--Correspondence
Dahlgren, John Adolphus Bernard, 1809-1870--Correspondence
Delamater, Cornelius Henry, 1821-1899--Correspondence
Elworth, Hjalmar--Correspondence
Ericson, Nils--Correspondence
Fox, Gustavus Vasa, 1821-1883--Correspondence
Griswold, John A. (John Augustus), 1818-1872--Correspondence
Haswell, Chas. H. (Charles Haynes), 1809-1907--Correspondence
Horsford, Eben Norton, 1818-1893--Correspondence
Ingersoll, Robert Green, 1833-1899--Correspondence
Jones, William Gore--Correspondence
Ogden, Francis Barber, 1783-1857--Correspondence
Oscar II, King of Sweden, 1829-1907--Correspondence
Paulding, Hiram, 1797-1878--Correspondence
Sargent, Epes, 1813-1880--Correspondence
Sargent, John Osborne, 1811-1891--Correspondence
Seward, William Henry, 1801-1872--Correspondence
Smith, Joseph, 1790-1877--Correspondence
Stockton, Robert Field, 1795-1866--Correspondence
Welles, Gideon, 1802-1878--Correspondence
United States. Navy --History--19th century
Monitor (Ironclad)
Princeton (Steamship)

Subjects:

Anti-submarine warfare
Armored vessels
Destroyers (Warships)
Floating batteries
Hydrometer

Marine engineering
Naval architecture
Ordnance, Naval
Propellers
Pyrometers
Shipbuilding
Solar energy
Warships
Warships--Turrets
United States--History, Naval--19th century

Occupations:

Engineers
Inventors

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of John Ericsson, engineer and inventor, were given to the Library of Congress by Agnes M. Church in 1945 and 1955. Additions were received as a deposit of the Naval History Society, 1913, and by purchase, 1975.

Processing History:

The papers of John Ericsson were processed in 1980. The finding aid was revised in 2003.

Transfers:

Photographs have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Copyright Status:

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of John Ericsson is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Microfilm:

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on six reels. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan.

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, John Ericsson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1803, July 31	Born, Vermland Province, Sweden
1815	Commissioned to make drawings for the Gota Canal Co.
1815-1820	Assistant leveler and leveler at various stations of the Gota Canal Co.
1820	Ensign, 23d Regiment Rifle Corps, Swedish army
1821	Commissioned second lieutenant
1825-1826	Constructed a condensing flame engine of ten horsepower

1826	Went to London, England
1827	Commissioned captain and later resigned from the Swedish army
1828	Designed steam fire engine for which he received the gold medal of the Mechanics Institute of New York in 1840 Made the first application to navigation of the principle of condensing steam and returning water to the boiler in the ship <i>Victory</i> Designed self-acting gun lock later applied to wrought iron gun of the <i>Princeton</i>
1829	Designed and constructed the steam locomotive <i>Novelty</i>
1830	Introduced "link motion" for reversing locomotive engines
1833	Introduced the "caloric" engine
1833-1834	Experimented with submerged propellers
1836	Invented and patented the screw propeller Married Amelia Byam
1837	Built steam vessel with two screw propellers
1838	Constructed the <i>Robert F. Stockton</i> , an iron screw steamer
1839	Came to the United States
1841	Furnished designs for the first screw-propelled warship, the <i>Princeton</i> , commissioned in 1844
1851	Exhibited inventions at United States division of the World's Fair in London Developed design and plans for the <i>Ericsson</i> , a ship propelled by "caloric" engines, completed in 1853
1854	Developed plans for a submerged armored vessel with guns in revolving shot-proof cupola placed centrally on deck
1861	Built <i>Monitor</i> , an armored ship embodying the features designed in 1854
1869	Constructed thirty steam gunboats for the Spanish government
1881	Devised the <i>Destroyer</i> , a submarine torpedo boat
1883	Erected "sun motor" which ran on solar energy at New York
1889, Mar. 8	Died, New York, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of John Ericsson (1803-1889) span the years 1821-1890, with the bulk of the material falling within the years 1842-1886. The collection consists of correspondence, design specifications, articles, memoranda, technical notes, financial and legal papers, drawings, and printed matter.

Ericsson's papers relate mainly to his designs and scientific pursuits following his emigration from England to the United States. Early letters, mainly correspondence with Robert Field Stockton, concern Ericsson's "caloric" engine and the development of the screw propeller as a means of propulsion for ships. In 1841 by contract with the United States Navy, Ericsson designed the *Princeton*, the first screw-propelled warship with motive machinery below the water line. His papers include correspondence, specifications, and notes relating to the construction of this ship, an early effect in modern naval construction.

The collection reflects Ericsson's continued interest in naval warfare. An earlier design for an armored vessel which Ericsson sent to Napoleon III in 1854 is included in his papers. After 1861 the papers contain numerous letters and other documents pertaining to the design and construction of the *Monitor*, the ironclad ship which defeated the *Merrimac* in 1862 and inspired the United States and other maritime nations to build armored monitor fleets. The progress of seafaring countries in accepting the ironclad vessels as components of their navies can be traced in Ericsson's correspondence. After the Civil War, Ericsson turned his attention to the vulnerability of armored ships and revived his earlier idea of a system of submarine attack using submerged lighter weight torpedo boats which featured speed and guided torpedoes as countermeasures to the impregnability of the ironclad ships. His plan was embodied in a boat which he called the *Destroyer*, and his papers from the late 1860s to 1888 contain letters detailing his efforts to sell the system to the United States and other maritime nations. Letters to S. B. Browning, his agent in London for all European countries except Sweden, depict Ericsson's strategy for creating interest in the *Destroyer* in England and eventually persuading the British Admiralty to purchase a vessel for test trials. Other topics related to naval defense include gun installations, floating batteries, revolving turrets, development of fleets, and the general outfitting of ships of war.

Letters to editors of scientific and naval journals describing Ericsson's designs and often responding to critiques made by other scientists and naval officers are interspersed throughout the correspondence. References to his work on solar energy can be found in several letters in the latter part of the 1860s. The specifications and technical notes file contains other papers relating to his designs and ideas, including materials on the pyrometer, the hydrometer, and other apparatuses which he exhibited at the 1851 World's Fair in London, as well as notes on various engines with which he was associated. Many of the letters are in Swedish, particularly the [family correspondence](#). Correspondence from 1889 to 1890 consists of letters addressed to Ericsson's biographer, William Conant Church.

Correspondents include A. Adlersparre, S. B. Browning, William E. Chandler, John Adolphus Bernard Dahlgren, Cornelius Henry Delamater, Hjalmar Elworth, Nils Ericson, Gustavus Vasa Fox, John A. Griswold, Charles H. Haswell, Eben Norton Horsford, Robert Green Ingersoll, William Gore Jones, Francis Barber Ogden, Oscar II, King of Sweden, Epes Sargent, John Osborne Sargent, William Henry Seward, Joseph Smith, Robert Field Stockton, and Gideon Welles.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in six series:

- [Diaries, 1841-1842](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1860-1883](#)
- [General Correspondence, 1821-1890, n.d.](#)
- [Writings File, 1833-1880, n.d.](#)
- [Financial Records, 1844-1889, n.d.](#)
- [Miscellany, 1836-1887, n.d.](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1 REEL 1	<u>Diaries, 1841-1842</u> Extract from Ericsson's daily journal.
BOX 1 REEL 1	<u>Family Correspondence, 1860-1883</u> Letters exchanged between Ericsson and his brother, Nils Ericson, and his son, Hjalmar Elworth. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1-4 REEL 1-5	<u>General Correspondence, 1821-1890, n.d.</u> Letters received, retained copies and drafts of letters sent, copies of cablegrams, and memoranda. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 5 REEL 5-6	<u>Writings File, 1833-1880, n.d.</u> Copies and drafts of articles, drawings, specifications, technical notes and memoranda, and poems. Arranged alphabetically by type of writing.
BOX 6-11 REEL 6	<u>Financial Records, 1844-1889, n.d.</u> Correspondence, notes, receipts, and checkbook stubs. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 11 REEL 6	<u>Miscellany, 1836-1887, n.d.</u> Biographical data, extracts and copies of articles relating to Ericsson and his inventions, legal papers, miscellaneous lists, technical papers, notes, and printed matter. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 18,203

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1 REEL 1	Diaries, 1841-1842 Extract from Ericsson's daily journal.
BOX 1 REEL 1	Extract from daily journal, 1841, Feb.-1842, Feb. 28
BOX 1 REEL 1	Family Correspondence, 1860-1883 Letters exchanged between Ericsson and his brother, Nils Ericson, and his son, Hjalmar Elworth. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1	1860-1883 (2 folders)
BOX 1-4 REEL 1-5	General Correspondence, 1821-1890, n.d. Letters received, retained copies and drafts of letters sent, copies of cablegrams, and memoranda. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1-2	1821, 1832, 1837-1863 (14 folders)
BOX 2 REEL 2-3	1864-1869 (11 folders)
BOX 3 REEL 4	1870-1881 (11 folders)
BOX 4 REEL 4-5	1882-1890, n.d. (13 folders)
BOX 5 REEL 5-6	Writings File, 1833-1880, n.d. Copies and drafts of articles, drawings, specifications, technical notes and memoranda, and poems. Arranged alphabetically by type of writing.

Writings File, 1833-1880, n.d.

Container

Contents

BOX 5
REEL 5-6

Articles

"American and English Iron Clads," 1862

"Improvements in Actuating and Regulating the Speed of Telegraphic Instruments," 1859

"Improvements in Street Locomotives," n.d.

"The Loss of the *Captain*," 1870

"Motive Engines," 1861

"Movable Torpedos," 1879

"New System of Naval Attack," with draft and fragmentary copy, 1854

"Submarine Warfare," 1880

"The Turret of the Pacific," 1862

List of articles by Ericsson

Poems

Specifications and technical notes

Centrifugal forces of the earth, 1870

Engines, 1836-1867

Miscellany

Notes and reply to charges by Sir John Ross in controversy over the *Victory* (steamship), 1833

Notes on meters, gauges, and other mensuration apparatus, 1849[?]

Notes on the moon, 1870

Screw propeller, 1837-1858

Ships

Dictator (bark), 1866

Ericsson (ship), 1854

Princeton (steamship), 1842-1846

Writings File, 1833-1880, n.d.

Container

Contents

Specification for an ironclad shot-proof steam floating battery

Spherical dynamic register

Drawings and engravings of designs

BOX 6-11

Financial Records, 1844-1889, n.d.

REEL 6

Correspondence, notes, receipts, and checkbook stubs.
Arranged chronologically.

BOX 6

Miscellaneous, 1844-1887, n.d.

REEL 6

(2 folders)

not filmed

Checkbook stubs

1844-1862

(6 folders)

BOX 7

1862-1871

(7 folders)

BOX 8

1871-1877

(8 folders)

BOX 9

1877-1882

(13 folders)

BOX 10

1882-1886

(10 folders)

BOX 11

1886-1889

(7 folders)

BOX 11

Miscellany, 1836-1887, n.d.

REEL 6

Biographical data, extracts and copies of articles relating to Ericsson and his inventions, legal papers, miscellaneous lists, technical papers, notes, and printed matter.
Arranged alphabetically by type of material.

BOX 11

Awards and prizes, lists of

REEL 6

Biographical data

Contributions to the centennial exhibition, 1877, Aug. 29

Contributions to the Kungliga Bibliotheket, Stockholm, Sweden, 1877, Oct. 17

Miscellany, 1836-1887, n.d.

Container

Contents

Extracts and copies of articles relating to Ericsson and his inventions, 1860-1887

Legal papers, agreements, affidavits and patent papers, 1836-1887

Lists of ironclad vessels in the United States Navy during the Civil War, 1878

Miscellaneous

(2 folders)

Naturalization papers, 1848

Printed matter

Sketch of Ericsson at twenty-one years of age